

Interview : Interview: In Conversation with Ms Anuradha Das - Head HR - Small Car, Tata Motors Limited, Ahmedabad (At the time of the interview, Ms Anuradha Das was Chief Human Resource officer, TAL Manufacturing Solutions Ltd.)

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VIM: Looking back to the early stages of your career, what made you get into various fields like Marketing, HR, IB and Operations?

Ms. Anuradha Das:When I started my career in 1986 there was very little awareness about the various fields that were available unlike today. There were streams like engineering, manufacturing and medical to choose from and a few others. When I joined Nicco Corporation as a trainee, I was put to a department called Power Cables where I was supposed to handle the marketing. Then, I wanted to get into General Management and so I took up Operations as my career to know the entire gamut of business and thereafter worked with various companies like Infotech, Hemani, etc. When I moved to TAL, I was considered as a change agent and therefore moved into the HR department which was a challenge in those times. With Operations background along with marketing skills, I could lead the HR department at my best.

VIM: Please help us realise the importance of multi-profession with respect to the competitive environment that we are facing today.

Ms. Anuradha Das:This question is of utmost importance. Aligning the HR strategies with the business strategies is very useful. In HR specially, it becomes very difficult to manage if one does not understand this. And not only is talent acquisition important, but developing the team is also important along with managing cost. Handling of HR is for those who not only have knowledge of HR domain but have knowledge of entire business handling.

VIM: Early on, who were your role models and what did you learn from them?

Ms. Anuradha Das:My superiors have always been my role

models. Mr. SatishPuri of NiccoCables was a dynamic leader and Mr Rajiv Kaul (Managing Director). Both of them are very analytical and have a lot of enthusiasm. Everything they did meant business. During my early years of work with them, I learnt that we need to behave like entrepreneurs and not mere employees of the organization. Also, my father was an entrepreneur who owned an engineering firm. I worked there while I was a student between the age group 18-20 years. That experience made me realise the expectations of the business owners.

VIM: What was the impetus that made you choose transit to HR?

Ms. Anuradha Das:It was the environment which made me choose the various fields in my career.For example, I was doing well in operation and marketing, but in the year 2000, when the organization felt that HR is a very important role in an organization; I was shifted to this department. Even today, I think organizations look for good HR people and those who by choice have come in HR. So I think, when Tata's recruited me, they first offered me the HR role. But I placed one condition in front of them that I will be interested in the job only if I don't get to do the normal PF and payroll related matter. I would handle only the strategic HR role. But today, even though I do not handle PF and payroll, the ultimate decision making lies with me. The change management lies with me.

VIM: In the initial phase of your career, did you envision what you would become?

Ms. Anuradha Das:Yes. Today, I am the Head HR of a large conglomerate, one of the largest in the world I say. But this is not the end of the world. I can become the CEO of a company. That is what I had decided while I was young.

VIM: As the Chief Human Resource Officer, how do you keep your department motivated in order to

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achieve their professional goals?

Ms. Anuradha Das: I first make my people knowledgeable and get them updated on regular basis regardless of the fact that how qualified they are or from which institute they have got their degrees. Since things are changing every day, I want to keep them updated and move to the best. I encourage them to go to XLRI, IIM, and also VIM. I never encourage anyone to go for distance learning or to go for any certified courses. I personally feel that these are of no meaning and will only help you to get a job but will never help you grow unless you apply the knowledge that you have learned. When you get a degree, you need to dwell in it and when you come to the workplace, you need to apply them. I am a strict boss you can say, but at the end of the day we all party together. We work hard and play hard.

VIM: TAL comprises of 4 business units. How do you manage such a diversified business at ease?

Ms. Anuradha Das: Yes, it is a very big challenge. TAL although a small company, we have varied business verticals. These include mass production, project business, batch production and aerospace. The workforce, resource and capability planning is also different for all these. So we need to understand the business and its requirements very well. For example, in aerospace, you know that there is no parking. So if an aeroplane breaks down, it crashes. Therefore we cannot make mistakes in any stage, whatever we do. So that mindset needs to be there. An automaker cannot go and manufacture an aerospace immediately the next day. It needs skill. Therefore it's a very big challenge and that's what we identify in people and screen them for the various business requirements. Also the training and development modules are different for different employees. The productivity measures are different. So one needs to be analytical, still he/she should manage with minimum resource for cost optimization.

VIM: How did you bring about reduction in the levels of organizational hierarchy and the restructuring there of from divisional to functional structure?

VIM: Can you share some of your experiences while interacting with the union Leaders / Representatives at TAL?

Ms. Anuradha Das: As you know that TAL is an offshore or a subsidiary company of Tata Motors, we have the same union as theirs and we are governed by the same settlement which has happened at 3 years interval. Apart from that, bonus and other issues are as per Tata Motors. It's a big union. We have been dealing on a daily basis but on the settlement we deal with them every 3 years. There have been challenges for cost optimization. We have

been asking people to come in one shift i.e. the general shift. So there can be difference in the workforce and the management that they may want to come in first shift. Here we deal with the union and make them understand what business needs and take them to the wardrobe. And there is a culture shift which I have brought in the handling of union. Like in business, we do review, where all business heads come together on a weekly basis to review the business as to what happened in the past and what needs to be done in the future. Similarly, when I took up IR, I used to get grievances on a daily basis. At that time, I decided that I should not handle it like this. We have to transfer some learning from the white collar employees to the blue collar and vice versa. So, what we did was, on a fortnightly basis, we call the union leaders along with the business heads and in this meeting, we share what we have achieved in the past 15 days and what we need to achieve in the next 15 days, what are the challenges and what are the things we can do together to overcome these challenges. So there they understand where is the cost going and do cost optimization.

As we all know, things like working in general shift, or many others, come through understanding. Instead of a top down approach, you handle it in the reverse order. You need to take the business heads and unions through the business results so that they themselves get convinced of what needs to be done and also cater to whatever they require. We have formally initiated the meetings. So the next time when we meet, we only give the feedback of what were the pending points of the meeting. So they get so surprised that we used to carry a small diary and always remind what all needs to be done. You are proactively seeing what needs to be done for us. So we are open to do what you want and this has been appreciated by Tata's and the union leaders. It helps reduce the conflicts and the friction between the two parties. They know that we will be meeting after 15 days and there is a forum to talk.

VIM: Tell us about the toughest negotiation that you have made with these Unions.

Ms. Anuradha Das: After the separation of Tata Motors, all were to wear a TAL I-Card. During the settlement, we made them realise that one needs to wear the company's I card and they were wearing a blank I card which can cause hazards if they meet with any accidents outside the company premises, it would become very difficult to identify the person. Touching this issue about safety they were convinced and within 6 months they were wearing the Company I card. It was a long negotiation and it was very tough which could not be done in the last 13 years by all my predecessors.

What are the initiatives that make TAL a great place to work at?

Ms. Anuradha Das:TAL is an engineering Company, so the kind of projects we handle are dream projects for any engineer. There are many big companies where an engineer may join and everything is mechanised and the system and processes are set. There can be challenges there also but because of the diversified business of TAL and very precision areas like aerospace and such projects. As an employer, we give the encouragement to have engineering background, to practice engineering in literal sense and that is our USP. People who are passionate about engineering they love to work here.

VIM: What piece of advice would you give to jobseekers looking to join TAL?

Ms. Anuradha Das:Passion. Nowadays, the institute provides various platforms like operations management, finance management, HR, Marketing, IB etc. One needs to be very passionate about this and you should go into the depth of it. If the degrees are only for certificates, it may not help to get a job. During our evaluation also we ask a lot of questions on the project work one may have done and try to find out whether that person himself/herself has done something or those documents have been given by the organisation. We try to understand whether that person has done something hands-on. The knowledge and the depth is of the jobseeker is priority.

So my advice is whatever you are doing, if you do it passionately, you will get into the depth of it and then you will work on those subjects, it won't be hard work for you. Hence, the students need to be more involved and ask a lot of questions. You can always ask questions and then your knowledge gets added up.

VIM: How do global crisis affect the HR field? Can you share a few experiences and challenges?

Ms. Anuradha Das:Business is not doing well. The dollar value is gone down, export has become difficult, and products are not selling. This is a critical business challenge today and keeps the workforce motivated and engaged during the slowdown because when it's not selling the general production level goes down. If you don't have work, productivity of mind goes down. For HR, in the coming days it would be a challenge to keep the workforce motivated especially the talented workforce. We should utilise this time for training and development, taking them through new technologies and then when economy comes back again and again production goes up and busy days come back. Till that time, HR needs to work on more technology and more development.

VIM: As the chief Human Resource Officer at TAL, what are your roles and responsibilities?

Ms. Anuradha Das:I take care of all admin. When I joined TAL, there was a challenge to build the brand within the organisation and talent acquisition was also a challenge. When we do talent acquisition, we have to sell our organisation so there marketing skill required and then build a brand within the campus. So that was the role given to me along with corporate relations. Corporate relations deal with internal and external communication. Internal communication means communicating with employees and external communication means managing website, doing events outside, showcasing your product. That was the initial role. Then I headed the HR Management of white collared workforce since 2010. Later, I was given opportunity to handle the blue collared workforce also. So, it is HR/Admin, corporate communication, knowledge management, public relations.

VIM: As MBA students we would like to know how you went about placing the brand Adam Parker across the country in the 1st year of operations and strengthening the distribution network.

Ms. Anuradha Das:That was again a challenge because I was new in the garment manufacturing industry but it was given a target given to us that production has to be completed in a year and it has to be launched so that the business viability is maintained because there was a huge amount of investment. But luckily I got a very good plan which had a line of machine and we went and hired people from the south. So the mantra to success is you need to have a good team. Building the team is very important. You have to do background integration. We went all the way to south and picked up leaders of production line and quality and 2nd thing was raw material. We tied up with Birla's and another company which deals with linen fabrics and we tied up with the best in the country and we built up a whole team. We also took some good designers and along with these the management background helped me achieve the target of launching it. So when you are in such kind of business, you have to understand what is critical, the workmanship, the design, quality, how you launch it and the location also. We chose Hyderabad. Bombay was a place we had chosen, but we test marketed it in Hyderabad because as a trend we have seen that people in Hyderabad are very flexible in their mind to test a new product.

VIM: What has been the most fulfilling professional experience in your journey from Nicco Corporation Ltd. to TAL?

Ms. Anuradha Das:I would say my experience in TAL has

been very interesting. I have been empowered by my superiors and they were none other than the TATA Companies. I have worked with president of TATA Motors and MD of TAL. I have been thrown to challenges and have been supported with resources and empowerment. There was a lot to do with building brand of TAL, putting up a workforce which can cater to the precision engineering. I also brought in a lot of diversity in the organisation by recruiting a lot of women, brought down average age of the organisation which was another challenge. I would also like to say that in the TATA Motors family, I'm the first women to handle the shop floor. Till now it has been a male dominated area. Also, I think I share a very excellent rapport with the Union Leaders.

VIM: In your position today, how do you see women in overall struggle for talent?

Ms. Anuradha Das: The first thing women should do is to stop discriminating themselves from men. Women should try to be equal and composed with self first and must consider every individual (men or women) as colleague and competitor. Every management takes care of the security and safety concerns of female staff. But Women should assure their own safety and security instead of expecting it from men colleagues or management. A woman should show assertiveness, upward behaviour, no-nonsense attitude instead of projecting her weaker side. Companies are looking for dynamic women to bring diversity to the workforce. Mr Cyrus Mistry spoke about bringing diversity at leadership level and that's how I was selected for this job along with my merits. The stringent mindset of the society against the working women is now changing and women are confidently leading the team. With such qualities and thinking there is no looking back for any ambitious woman.

VIM: Do women lead differently than men?

Ms. Anuradha Das: I personally don't think so. Leadership style differs from individual to individual. At the end of the day results is what matters. May it be a man or woman leading the team, the performance is monitored by the contribution and the profits it churned out for the company.

VIM: In your achievements, you have mentioned that you were an active member of Vikas Charitable Trust. Can you elaborate on your activities regarding the same?

Ms. Anuradha Das: The opportunity came to me when my husband was working with Kirloskar Motors. The company has the policy of engaging the wives of the senior staff with activities which are beneficial for the society. I got a chance to contribute to "Education upliftment" in Sangli, Satara,

Kirloskar Wadi, and surrounding region. The main focus was on the encouraging women education in the region. We as a team travelled extensively and encouraged the mothers to send their daughters to school even if they fail in exams. After root cause analysis of their failure in academics, we identified that it was the regular household chores which affected their scores. My other assignment was where I was working as a teacher in one of the schools of Kirloskar. There I found that although good in academics the students lacked in communication skills and presentation. So I conducted their communication skill class on regular basis to build up their confidence.

VIM: Out of your busy schedule how do you strike a balance between your personal and professional life?

Ms. Anuradha Das: It is a challenge. The important thing is to enjoy your work and do it passionately. I enjoy parenting and looking after my house is my hobby. We work in the companies where we implement and practice best standards to ensure maximum production along with other healthy aspects. I also implemented such concepts to my home where things are organised efficiently and reduces the time and efforts. As we imply Management of workforce at company, I practice it at home as well, where the house help and other assisting staff are motivated and rewarded to perform their tasks efficiently. Being at work for 10-12 hours a day I don't have to worry about my home because everyone from my family and staff contribute in maintaining the balance. I get a lot of support from my family which motivates me to excel at work.

VIM: How do you occupy yourself in leisure time?

Ms. Anuradha Das: I keep myself busy with parenting and house-keeping. Along with that I am fond of gardening and have maintained a kitchen garden. It offers me home grown lemons, chillies, various herbs along with other flowering plants.

VIM: What do you value most about yourself as a leader?

Ms. Anuradha Das: Being truthful, sincere and honest always pays off. Never be manipulative but strive for perfection at your work. Nothing matters more than good results.

VIM: How do you come up with new ideas and stay ahead of new trends?

Ms. Anuradha Das: There is always scope for innovation and doing better. TATA conglomerate is a trendsetter and known for bringing new ideas and concepts to the industry.



Initiatives like PF, maternity leave were introduced by TATA and much later were followed by the government system. 5 day week concept was again introduced in India by TATA. It is the result of the connection with the people and understanding what they expect. We built the new systems which are IT enabled resulting in reducing the paper work, process time and human interface which can be time consuming and emotionally influenced.

VIM: Coming to the last question, your advice to upcoming HR professionals with respect to the trends in the industry to have a flourishing career.

Ms. Anuradha Das:HR is now becoming a part of designing business policies of the company. The HR professionals must concentrate on HR Analytics. A HR professional must think as a business person along with having qualities like being friendly and sympathetic which are required to be a good HR professional. Considering the current business scenario, a HR professional must be analytical and more logical in taking decision in relation to employee policy, effectiveness of training, right sizing of the organisation and so on. I would advice to stay updated with current trends and also to work smartly and passionately.